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The Scholars and the Children



A Christmas Play
by
Helen Josephine Robins

TO
M. T. M.

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By Helen Josephine Robins

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The Scholars and the Children.

Across the back of the stage are hung closed curtains. To the left is a large open fire-place. To the right is a group composed of *St. George*, *the Dragon*, *The Boar's Head* (a little cook, a boy, carrying a boar's head on a platter), *Plum Pudding* (a little cook, a boy, carrying a plum pudding on a platter; the pudding is decorated with holly), *Mistletoe* (a little girl dressed in white and pale green, decorated with mistletoe), and the *Christmas Tree* (a little girl dressed in white and dull green, decorated with branches of fir, and pine cones; there are patches of snow on the branches). These are all standing before two old men (seated) in long robes of soft, dark colours; the men have beards and grey hair; to one side of them a young clerk keeps a record of the meeting. As the curtain rises the Dragon is chuckling aloud.

FIRST OLD MAN (*to the other*).—What can be the matter with him?

SECOND OLD MAN (*to St. George*).—Have you any idea what he's laughing at, St. George?

ST. GEORGE (*politely*).—I think I have, gentle sir.

FIRST OLD MAN.—Pray tell us what it is.

ST. GEORGE.—Possibly you would rather I didn't.

SECOND OLD MAN.—Why so?

ST. GEORGE.—Because, good sir, I fear that he is laughing at you.

FIRST OLD MAN. At us! (*to other old man*)—What is there about *us* to make a dragon laugh? I am sure we are very serious! (*To St. George*)—Have you any idea *why* he should laugh at *us*?

ST. GEORGE.—Well, to tell the truth, I have. He thinks the question you asked him is very funny. (*Poking the Dragon with his sword*) Tell him why you think it's funny!

DRAGON (*still chuckling*).—It's such a joke, you know! You asks whether it's *me* as makes it Christmas for the children. My scales and fiery breath! Why this here Christmas o' yourn's the biggest Christian Festival you uns has, and me! Why I'm a most turrible heathen! Me make Christmas! Ha, ha, ha! (*To St. George*)—Ain't they a pair of awful old duffers?

ST. GEORGE.—Hush, Dragon! Don't be so rude to them, even if they *do* seem absurd!

DRAGON.—Hm! They're *old* enough to know better.

ST. GEORGE.—Sh! sh! (*The old men speak in a whisper to each other.*)

FIRST OLD MAN (*to St. George*).—We are sorry to seem absurd, sir; we really are very much in earnest. You see we are making a study of life. Now there is always a great deal done at Christmastide for the children, and we wish to understand what it all means. That's why we have called this meeting. (*To the Dragon.*)—If, as you say, you have nothing to do with a Christian feast, how did you ever get into Christmas in the first place?

DRAGON.—*That's easy; I got in with my old friend St. George here. Ask him. He understands all about it, he'll tell you. I can't answer no more o' your silly questions. I'm hoarst now with talking! I'd rather roar any day!* (Roars. *The two old men and the clerk jump from their seats in terror*). There! Did you ever hear a Christian do that! (Rocks with laughter.)

SECOND OLD MAN.—Perhaps you will be so kind as to explain, St. George. You are *such* a gentleman.

ST. GEORGE.—Naturally I am. But the Dragon is quite right. He got into Christmas because I kill him then, every year, for a revel, you see. He's very obliging about it. His manners are not much to boast of, I'll grant, but he's really the soul of good nature.

DRAGON.—Oh, now! Come on! It doesn't hurt much! Show them how you do it. (Throws himself on the ground and roars again. St. George kills him, then strikes an attitude, and with one foot on the Dragon, recites from the old play*):

ST. GEORGE.

“Here am I, St. George,
That worthy champion bold,
And with my sword and spear,
I won three crowns of gold.
I fought the fiery dragon,
And brought him to the slaughter;
By that I won fair Sabra,
The King of Egypt's daughter.

*“St. George and the Dragon, a modern Cornish Christmas play.” (Edited by Ernest Rhys).

(Comes away from the Dragon)—Those are my lines in the old play, you see. (Old men both applaud delightedly, having followed the fight with great eagerness and excitement. They whisper together, shaking their heads.)

FIRST OLD MAN.—Bravo! And this is a *revel*, you say. And so this is the way you keep Christmas for the children!

ST. GEORGE (*impatiently*)—Why no!—it's only a part of the fun at Christmas. I *keep* the *feast* like any other Christian.

SECOND OLD MAN.—Then it's you that makes Christmas?

ST. GEORGE—I? My *dear* sir! Pardon me, but by my sword and spear, I fear you know very little history. Why Christmas is as old as Christianity, and I belong only so far back as the _____.

DRAGON.—I say! A child knows more about it than they know. You don't suppose *they* were ever born in any Christian land, do you? Why, I believe they're Turks! Ha, ha, ha! (*Rolls over and over on the floor laughing.*)

ST. GEORGE.—Dragon, you're perfectly disgraceful. It's shockingly rude to laugh in any one's face as you are doing. Get up, and come along with me. I'm ashamed of you. (*Bows courteously to the two old men, and goes out arm in arm with the Dragon, who is still laughing.*)

FIRST OLD MAN TO SECOND.—I wish *you'd* speak to the Boar's Head. These beasts are so uncivilized.

BOAR'S HEAD.—*I'll* speak without being spoken to, and I'll tell you this: If you address the same

foolish question to me that you put to the Dragon, you'll get the same answer. I don't make Christmas either. I'm a heathen, too.

MISTLETOE (*dancing forward*).—And so am I. The Druids used to cut me off the oaks in England before there *was* any Christmas there; and the Christians kept on cutting me off after there were no Druids left. Do you wonder? See how pretty I am! (*She turns round and round.*) See what I can do! (*She runs across and holds a sprig of mistletoe over the heads of Plum Pudding and Christmas Tree; P. P. kisses C. T. Mistletoe then tiptoes back of the Boar's Head, laughing, and tries to hold the sprig over him. She dances round him; he runs away from her, and she chases him off the stage, singing: "The Boar's Head as I understand, Is the bravest dish in all the land!"**)

FIRST OLD MAN (*in despair*).—I suppose the next one is the Plum Pudding.

P. P. (*abruptly*).—Oh, don't count me! I'm only a part of the refreshments, like the goose or the turkey, or the mince pies! You have the Christmas dinner on account of Christmas—you don't have Christmas on account of the dinner, do you? By nuts and raisins! You are a silly old pair! Good day, I'm off! (*Goes out, laughing, and calls back, "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!"*)

SECOND OLD MAN.—Well, surely then it *must* be the Christmas Tree—there's no one else left.

C. T.—Dear, dear! I'm no use by myself, as I am. You must wait for Santa Claus to trim me before I shall be worth your asking *me* any questions.

*Stanza 2 of the old English "Boar's Head Carol."

FIRST OLD MAN.—Santa Claus? What is that?

C. T.—What! You never heard of Santa Claus?
My stars and tinsel, what ignorance!

(*Sleigh bells are heard outside. Christmas Tree runs to the fire-place and looks up into it.*)

CLERK.—This Santa Claus was invited to the meeting, sirs, and I am sure he intends to come.

C. T.—I hear him now, calling to his reindeer!

(*Santa Claus is heard outside, while the sleigh bells still jingle.*)

SANTA CLAUS.—“Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer!
Now, Prancer! Now, Vixen! On, Comet! On
Cupid! On, Donder, and Blitzen!”* (He comes
down the chimney, and enters, clapping his hands to
warm them, and stamping his feet.)

S. C.—Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!
Sorry to be late, but you know this is my very busiest
day, and I really have no time for grown-ups. (To
Christmas Tree).—Your new trimmings are out in
my pack, and if—(C. T. *rushes out, clapping her
hands in delight*). There now, she’s off, at the mere
mention of new clothes. Just like a girl! (To the
Old Men)—Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you!

FIRST OLD MAN.—You can, we trust, tell us what
we almost despair of learning, the reason that the
whole world celebrates Christmas. Are you the
reason?

S. C. (*Looking at them in amazement*)—Am I
the reason that—by chimneys and holly berries!
(*Shakes with silent laughter, turns away to conceal*

* “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” by C. C. Moore.

it). Why, why, no! I'm not the *reason*. Of course I try to make Christmas the happiest day in the year, but the *reason* the whole world celebrates it? Do you mean to say you don't know *that*?

BOTH OLD MEN (*together*).—No, no! And we are *so* eager to know!

S. C.—Christmas stockings! Why any *child* could tell you in the twinkling of an eye. Why don't you call the children in and ask *them*?

FIRST OLD MAN.—Call the *children* in? Why, where are they?

SECOND OLD MAN.—Yes, where are they?

S. C. (*coolly*)—Oh, they can't be far off. They're never far away from *me*. (*Laughing*).—It's as much as I can do to keep them out while I trim the tree and fill the stockings. Shall I call them in for you?

OLD MAN.—*Please do!*

(*Santa Claus whistles. The children run in from both sides of the stage, surround him, and cling to him, crying, "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!"*)

S. C.—Merry Christmas, my dears! These gentlemen have a question to ask you.

CHILDREN.—A question for *us*?

FIRST OLD MAN.—Yes, yes, we wish to ask why you celebrate Christmas.

CHILDREN (*to one another and to S. C.*)—*Why we celebrate Christmas?*

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—Santa Claus, don't they *really* know?



S. C.—I believe they *really* don't.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL.—But didn't their mothers tell them?

THIRD LITTLE GIRL (*looking sadly at the Old Men*)—Perhaps they never *had* any mothers.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—Or perhaps they are so old that they have forgotten what their mothers did tell them.

THIRD LITTLE GIRL.—But Santa Claus is old, and *he* hasn't forgotten the things that we know.

S. C.—Bless your heart! That's because I'm a child myself. Why children, dear, *I've* never grown up.

CHILDREN (*clapping their hands*).—O, we're so glad!

FIRST LITTLE GIRL (*pointing to the two Old Men*).—Santa Claus, dear, who *are* they?

S. C.—They are great scholars.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL (*timidly*).—And *what* are "great scholars"?

S. C.—Very wise men.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL.—But the Wise Men from the East knew about Christmas without asking! (*to the Old Men*). Why they brought the first gifts more than nineteen hundred years ago. That is why Santa Claus brings us gifts to-day.

FIRST OLD MAN (*eagerly*).—And to whom did they bring them?

SECOND LITTLE GIRL.—Why, to the Baby Christ, of course. Don't you know that to-day is His birthday? That's what we're celebrating.

SECOND OLD MAN.—So our question is *answered*! Then it is because of the Baby Christ that you keep Christmas?

CHILDREN.—Yes, yes!

FIRST OLD MAN.—And where was He born?

SECOND LITTLE GIRL.—In Bethlehem—in the poor little stable. *Don't* you remember?

THIRD LITTLE GIRL.—Why the shepherds knew that without asking.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—But the angel told *them*.

THIRD LITTLE GIRL.—The Wise Men knew.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—But *they* saw the star, didn't they, Santa Claus?

S. C.—Yes, my dear. But *these* Wise Men have neither heard the angel nor seen the star, and so they do not understand.

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—*Poor* old Wise Men! Santa Claus, don't you think we ought to tell them all about Our Saviour when He was a baby?

CHILDREN.—Oh, yes, yes!

(*Santa Claus nods approval.*)

FIRST LITTLE GIRL.—They must be so sad and lonely if they do not know the Baby Jesus. (*To the Old Men*) Listen, we will tell you about Him!

BOTH OLD MEN.—Yes, Yes! (*Lean forward eagerly.*)

The children sing: “God rest you, Merry Gentlemen.”

After this the curtains at the back of the stage open to show a tableau of the Nativity with the Shepherds and the Magi kneeling in adoration, and angels in the background. The children and all the others kneel, and with the Angels, the Magi, and the Shepherds, join in “Adeste Fideles.”

Curtain:



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